

Green Grows Nicaragua!

(Quest for Peace staff member, Tom Loudon, traveled to Nicaragua to visit reforestation efforts supported by Quest for Peace. This article is posted on the Quest web site at <http://quest.quixote.org>. We share this article both as a testament to the wonderful, continuing work of Quest for Peace, but to the work of FEDICAMP, one of PeaceWorks' Nicaraguan partner organizations. The Quest, working with the Institute of John XXIII at the University of Central America in Managua, helped spark the formation of scores of community associations such as FEDICAMP, bringing housing, electricity, microlending projects, and more community-led innovations to communities throughout Nicaragua. Wherever our PeaceWorks' delegations travel in Northern Nicaragua in the company of FEDICAMP, we followed in the footsteps of Quest and the Institute.)

In February I traveled with FEDICAMP, a peasant federation in northern Nicaragua, to visit tree nurseries for this year's reforestation effort in San Juan de Limay. The last time I traveled to Limay was January 1985 when the U.S. sponsored Contra forces were launching attacks in area. I was taking a delegation to Limay and the Contra had carried out several deadly ambushes on the road prior to our visit. During the 1990s our family lived in Achuapa just 10 miles from Limay, but the road connecting the two towns was un-passable. My journey to Limay this year was an entirely new experience.

San Juan de Limay is a two hour journey on a long, dusty road from Esteli. Half an hour outside of Esteli, we began to see enormous stone sculptures, "gordas" (large, Dionysian women) sitting at intervals along the road. San Juan de Limay is famous for its stone sculptors who hew an unimaginable array of sculptures from the abundant soapstone in the area. The reception line of "gordas" provided a surprising and delightful welcome.

We stopped at the edge of town, where the mayor's office, local high school students and the National Forestry Ministry are working together on Limay's first municipal nursery which will provide 20,000 trees for planting throughout the municipality. Students were busy clearing land and hauling gravel, manure, and water to fill bags for seedlings. FEDICAMP works to involve young people to assure that the next generation will have a strong commitment to planting trees and to continue the process of transforming the legacy of deforestation.

Outside of Limay, we visited several communities where local nurseries are already established. Community members work together to fence off a space near available water, fill bags, exchange and plant seeds. The first seedlings were just beginning to poke their way out of the bags. Like the seedlings emerging in the nurseries, I encountered innovations and new ways of thinking everywhere I turned!

Nutrition is a serious, chronic problem in this dry, rural region of subsistence farmers. Families can't afford to buy fruit and vegetables that provide necessary vitamins and minerals. Chickens and pigs run loose making family gardens difficult to protect, especially in the dry season, as these animals have an uncanny ability to penetrate fencing and eat whatever is green. FEDICAMP has solved this problem with a simple, but brilliant method using an old environmental menace - discarded truck tires. They salvage truck tires, split them and turn them inside out to make large, durable planting containers. The tires are placed on raised platforms built of scrap wood and branches, keeping the 'garden' 3-4 feet high, well out of animals' reach.

FEDICAMP communities are emphatic about their commitment to organic farming. Fifteen years ago I worked with a peasant organization in this region, and it is amazing to see the dramatic transformation in farming from the slash/burn and heavy chemical use of that time to the widespread organic practices of today. The improvement in soil quality and ability to produce compost, other natural fertilizers and insecticides is recognized as an important survival strategy for the economic crisis as it lessens dependence on outputs. The emerging seedlings, forests, patio gardens, and diversity of production in the midst of food and ecological crisis is a testimony to the creativity that is generated from this new partnership between people and the earth.

Quest for Peace is a program of the Quixote Center in Brentwood, MD.

*quest@quixote.org Phone: 301-699-0042 Fax: 301-864-2182
Quest for Peace, P.O. Box 5206, Hyattsville, MD 20782*